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AUTHOR Taguchi, Hillevi Lenz; Munkammar, Ingmarie

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ABSTRACT

As part of a UNESCO-sponsored series of studies examining how integrated and coordinated early childhood policies are implemented, this report presents a case study of the process of integrating early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Sweden under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science. The report outlines the reforms preceding the integration, concepts prevailing in the field, rationales behind the reform, the process itself, and its impact and consequences. Emphasized within the report is the finding that with formal integration at the ministerial level, ECEC shifted from the arena of social and family affairs to the educational sphere. Through the reforms of 2001 and 2002, preschool became a right for all children in Swedish society, bringing Sweden closer to the ideal of universal preschool as the first stage of lifelong learning. The processes, consequences, and impacts of the policy differed significantly among Sweden's 289 municipalities. It is noted that the integration of the two school forms resulted from a well-planned process with a strong pedagogical rationale in some municipalities, while in others the rationale was mainly financial. Integration translated into overall financial gain as well as further progress toward the goal of preschool for all children. One of the major lessons learned from the policy changes was that the personnel involved, including teachers, recreational instructors, and day care attendants, need time to adjust to the new integrated work teams, to document their new practices, and to collectively reflect on the change. (Contains 68 references.) (Author/KB)

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Hillevi Lenz Taguchi,
Stockholm Institute of Education (Sweden)
Ingmarie Munkammar,
Luleå University of Technology (Sweden)

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Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, Stockholm Institute of Education
Ingmarie Munkammar, Luleå University of Technology

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Hillevi Lenz Taguchi, Ph.D. in Education, is a researcher and assistant professor at the Stockholm Institute of Education, Department of Human Development, Special Education and Learning, P.O. Box 47308, SE-100 74 Stockholm, Sweden (Hillevi.Lenz-Taguchi@lhs.se)

Ingmarie Munkammar, Ph.D. in Education, is a researcher and assistant professor at the Luleå University of Technology, the Centre for Research in Learning, SE-971 87 Luleå, Sweden. (Ingmarie.Munkhammar@lh.luth.se)

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Abstract

This report presents a case study of the process begun in Sweden in 1996 to integrate early childhood education and care under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science. It outlines the reforms that preceded the integration, the concepts prevailing in the field at the time, the rationales behind the reform, the process itself, and its impact and consequences. With formal integration at the ministerial level, early childhood education and care shifted from the arena of social and family affairs to the educational sphere. Debate has persisted since the 1940s over whether pre-schooling is an activity belonging primarily to care or education. The view that it belongs to both realms tipped the balance heavily towards childcare up until the new millennium. Through the reforms of 2001 and 2002, pre-school finally became a right for *all* children in Swedish society, irrespective of whether their parents were unemployed or on parental leave. In 2002, fee structures were reformed, and the following year, four- and five-year-olds won the right to 525 hours of free pre-schooling year. These reforms bring Sweden ever closer to the ideal of universal pre-schooling as the first stage of lifelong learning, a goal that has been pursued for nearly 100 years. In a highly decentralised yet regulated country, the processes, consequences and impacts differ significantly among Sweden's 289 municipalities. The integration of the two school forms was the result of a well-planned process with a strong pedagogical rationale in some municipalities, while in others the rationale was mainly financial. In any case, integration invariably translates into overall financial gain as well as further progress towards the goal of pre-school for all children. A lesson learnt, however, is that the pursuit of savings cannot be taken too far, since various personnel – schoolteachers, pre-school teachers, recreational instructors and day-care attendants – need time to adjust to the new integrated work teams, document their new practices and collectively reflect on the changes.

Consolidating Governmental Early Childhood Education and Care Services Under the Ministry of Education and Science: A Swedish Case Study

I. The context in which early childhood education and care was integrated under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science

1.1 Overview of early childhood education in Sweden today

1.1.1 Terms and general statistics

In official discourse as well as the mass media, the term "childcare", or *barnomsorg* in Swedish, remains in use despite efforts since 1972 to have all services simply renamed "pre-school". In this report "pre-school" and "pre-schooling" refer to services offered to children up to age six. The term "early childhood education and care" refers to pre-school services as well as childcare for school-aged children in leisure-time centres, or, as we prefer to call them, activity centres.

The official school starting age in Sweden is still seven years, and children are required to attend nine years of schooling. Today 98% of Swedish six-year-olds attend a pre-school class on school premises, and thus actually spend 10 years in the compulsory school system. Today about 75% of children in Sweden aged 1-5, and 65% of children aged 6-9 are registered in some form of early childhood education and care service (Skolverket, 2001b).

1.1.2 Services

Pre-school and after-school services have theoretically been available since the late 1960s to children aged 0-12 years whose parents are working or studying. Actual availability to all families needing the services did not become a reality, however, until the middle of the 1990s. Since July 2001, children of *unemployed* parents also have the right to pre-school services for three hours per day. From January 1, 2002, the obligation to provide services will also apply for children whose parents are on parental leave because of a younger sibling. Children in need of special support have always been entitled to a place at a pre-school or leisure-time/activity centre ahead of other children. The following services are available:

- **The pre-school** (*förskola*) is a full-day service open all year, with opening times designed to fit parents' working hours. Children are usually divided into groups of between 15 and 24. Generally three employees – including at least one teacher – are allocated to each group. The average pre-school comprises three such groups. In 1999 about 64% of all children aged 1-5 attended pre-school, or 319,000 children in all (Skolverket, 2001b).
- **Family day care** (*familjedaghem*) involves municipal child-minders providing home care. The children are registered and opening hours are varied to fit in with parents' schedules. Family day care is a complementary early childhood service for children who for one reason or another need to be in a smaller group, or who live far from the nearest pre-school, and is situated in the home of the childminder. This alternative is thus more common in rural areas and in small towns than in metropolitan areas. Family day care is also provided for schoolchildren outside school hours as well. The number of children in family day care has steadily declined since the late 1980s, today standing at some 11% of all children aged 1-5. In the autumn of 1999, about

3% of all children aged 6-9 were in family day care. In total about 69,000 children were registered in family day care in 1999 (Skolverket, 2001b).

- **The leisure-time or activity centre** (*fritidshem*) is childcare for school-age children previously located in facilities outside the school, sometimes connected to a pre-school. During the 1990s the centres were integrated with school facilities. The centres are open all year round, and daily opening hours are varied to fit parents' schedules before and after school hours. The programmes are designed to supplement schooling, help children in their development as well as provide them with meaningful activities before and after school. In 1999 about 332,000 children attended these centres one or more days a week. Attendance has increased because of the integration of six-year-olds into pre-school classes, and because children from the "baby boom" of the late 1980s and early 1990s are now in school (Skolverket, 2001b).
- **The open pre-school** (*öppna förskolan*) is a service, usually free of charge, for parents who are not working nor studying. This service is also used by family day care child-minders for their groups of children that they otherwise care for in their own homes, in order to have access to pedagogical materials not available in their homes and to provide these children with an opportunity to interact with other children. The children must be accompanied by a parent or child-minder. In some housing areas, open pre-schools collaborate with public bodies such as social welfare, maternity care and child health-care services. Children are not registered and are not required to attend regularly. In the autumn of 1999 there were about 900 open pre-schools in Sweden.

1.1.3 Funding

Funding of pre-school services, childcare for school-age children as well as compulsory and upper secondary schooling is the full responsibility of the municipalities, and is financed by central government grants plus local tax revenue and parental fees. The government funds are not specifically earmarked for early childhood education and care, but are part of a general-purpose grant to be used in a number of different sectors.

In 1998, the overall budget for early childhood education and care amounted to 39 billion Swedish kronor (4.15 billion US dollars), making up 15 percent of the local authorities' total expenditures. Parental fees accounted for just under 17 percent of the budget (Skolverket, 2001a). Municipalities set the parents' fees, often calculated according to total family income and the child's hours of attendance. As a result, fees have varied considerably between municipalities. From January 1, 2002, all municipalities have agreed on maximum fees for pre-schooling recommended by the government. The fee may not exceed three percent of the family's income or 1,140 kronor per month for the family's first child, 760 kronor for the second child and 380 kronor for the third child. For school-age childcare (leisure-time/activity centres), the fee may not exceed 760 kronor per month for the family's first child, and 380 kronor for the second and third child (Skolverket, 2001b).

1.1.4 Legislation and curriculum

The Education Act, reformed in 1998, regulates early childhood education and care as well as compulsory schooling, specifying requirements for the provision of high-quality services. Restrictions on the use of government grants were tightened, since local authorities did not supply early childhood education services to the extent expected.

Under the new act, employees are to have sufficient training or experience to be able to satisfy the child's needs for both care and stimulating pedagogical activities. Premises are to be well adapted to their purpose, groups are to be suitably mixed and of appropriate size, and activities are to be based on the individual needs of each child (Skolverket, 2001b).

All the above services must follow the curricula for pre-school for children of 1-5 years (Lpfö 98) or compulsory school for children of 6 to 16 years (Lpo 94/98). The first national pre-school curriculum was launched in 1998, and the compulsory school curriculum was revised in 1998 to include the pre-school class and the leisure-time/activity centres.

1.1.5 Staff

Personnel in early childhood education and care usually have some kind of training for working with children. The four staff categories are:

- pre-school teachers;
- recreational instructors (also referred to as leisure-time pedagogues in some translations);
- day-care attendants (or child-minders); and
- child-minders in family day care (or family child-minders).

Previously pre-school teachers and recreational instructors underwent a three-year pedagogical and practical training programme at a university focusing on learning methods, developmental psychology, family sociology and creative activities. As of the autumn of 2001, pre-school teachers, recreational instructors and first-year compulsory schoolteachers all undergo three and a half years of pedagogical and practical training. About half of pre-school personnel have a university degree, and the rest are day-care attendants with an upper secondary school qualification, or child-minders who have taken municipal training courses. At leisure-time/activity centres, some 70 percent have degrees in recreational or leisure education, or some other kind of teacher training, while 20 percent are day-care attendants. About 2-3 percent of pre-school staff and about 5 percent of leisure-time/activity centre personnel are men (Skolverket, 2001b).

1.1.6 Salaries

The salary of staff with a university education is generally about 10 percent higher than that of day-care attendants. Pre-school teachers and recreational instructors earn about 20 percent less than primary and secondary schoolteachers and about 30 percent less than upper secondary schoolteachers (Skolverket, 2001a). Teachers generally have lower incomes to other academic professionals, but salaries vary considerably according to location. Teachers in the cities generally have higher salaries, reflecting higher living costs

1.2 Early political interest in the education and care of pre-school children

1.2.1 The pre-school as a "cornerstone" of welfare society

The first infant nurseries/crèches were established for children with evident social needs and were funded by charitable organisations in the 1850s. The first kindergartens were set up in the 1890s to provide part time pre-school education for middle-class children. Strong forces among politicians, prominent philanthropists and medical doctors led to the start of pre-school activities with a holistic view of care, health and pedagogy/education in *Folkbarnträdgård*, or public kindergartens. The first of these, opened in 1904 (Simmons-Christenson, 1991), was a full-day activity centre for children of all social classes from age three. This pre-school was launched specifically as a home-like setting based on the new middle-class home as an ideal, where medical, social, caring and educational services were integrated (Tallberg Broman, 1991). One aim of these collaborating forces was to *counteract and avoid* inequitable distribution of early childhood services in relation to class (ability to pay) or content (day-care, nursery, crèche or Fröbel-inspired learning activities in *Barnträdgården*). The desire was to create programmes from a holistic viewpoint, uniting different classes as much as possible behind a consensus view of how to raise children to become normal, healthy

and democratic middle-class citizens. In today's policy statements, this is described as a holistic or "overall view of the child's development and learning needs, bringing together health care, social care, fostering and teaching" and "ensuring that the well-being of the child also has educational implications". This holistic view is conceptualized by the National Agency for Education in the following way: "Children learn all the time and with all their senses," therefore "it is not possible to identify any specific occasions when development or learning actually occurs" (Skolverket, 2001b).

Even though it would be many years before public kindergarten *(Folkbarnträdgården)* would serve a substantial majority of pre-school aged children, early childhood education was politically understood as a cornerstone of the welfare society (Hultqvist, 1990; 1998). Up until the 1980s there had been a *general and basic trust in the Swedish state to implement democracy as a collectively funded centralised welfare society*. Throughout this period there was a political majority and a will to prioritise issues concerning small children, whether they related to care, health or education. Opposing voices were however always present in the political debate, which was perceived by voters as a *left–right* ideological conflict, between a socialist ideology of the state as the main care-taker of children, and a liberal or conservative ideal of the family as the foundation of a child's upbringing. But the conflict has been much more blurred in terms of *state–family* or *private–public*, compared with other western democracies. Especially the liberals have co-operated extensively with socialists to expand public services of all kinds, which has undermined the autonomy of the family. Right-wing politicians and voters have been rather ambivalent and inconsistent in asserting the autonomy and integrity of the family as an institution. Concerns of the family, such as childcare, maternity care and child health care, have been successfully integrated in centralised state policies, and are of central concern.

Support for pre-schooling as a cornerstone of the welfare society has, however, been based on the implicit notion that the family is not sufficiently capable of taking care of its own children and in need of support for the endeavour (Hultqvist, 1997). Critics have pointed to a political will to "pedagogize" and regulate both childhood and family life to an extreme extent, in an attempt to create an all-encompassing welfare state (Lenz Taguchi, 1996; 2000). Although similar critiques have been raised in other western countries (Fendler, 2001; Popkewitz, 1998; Rose, 1999), it seems, from a Swedish point of view, that the trust placed in the state to integrate the private domain into state policies has been far greater in Sweden than in any other western democracy (Hultqvist, 1998).

1.2.2 Pre-school as a social or educational issue?

As it turned out, Sweden took longer than its neighbours to finally make early childhood education and care a fully state-funded activity, administered by municipalities. The problem stemmed partly from disagreement over whether pre-schooling was more an educational issue or a social one. The pioneers, backed mainly by liberal politicians, insisted that pre-schooling was an educational issue. The 1940s had already seen heated arguments over whether school or social authorities were best suited to supervise the institutions. The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs was given the responsibility, but the decision was far from unanimous. The Ministry of Education was involved to the extent that in many cases children were submitted to tests to determine whether they were "mature" enough – socially and psychologically – to start school. Swedish children have generally not had to have skills as advanced as those of their French and British counterparts. Writing, reading and math skills were left entirely to the school years.

Pre-schooling received its first state funding in 1943, under legislation stipulating that responsibility for developing and regulating pre-schooling would gradually shift from the state to the municipalities. By 1961, the municipalities managed 65 percent of early childhood education and care, and in 1970 nearly all institutions (96%) were under the control of the municipalities. Thus the reform took 30 years to be completed (Johansson & Åstedt, 1993).

As pre-schooling became fully state-funded, private management was generally not permitted. In the late 1980s, "semi-private" pre-schooling and day care was allowed, but funding was still indexed to per-child tax revenues, and these pre-schools were not allowed to charge higher fees than municipal pre-schools, and they had to reinvest any profits for the benefit of the children and staff. In 1996, early childhood education and care was formally integrated under the Ministry of Education and Science, and pre-schooling ceased to be viewed as an issue of social policy and became part of the education policy.

1.2.3 The view of the child in pre-school and compulsory school

The basic assumption underlying the nurturing and instruction of the pre-school child is contained in the phrase *freedom by normalisation*. This explicit ideal combined Fröblian pedagogical ideas of freedom with new developmental psychology (Lenz Taguchi, 2000) based on the findings of Karl and Charlotte Bühler and transplanted to Sweden from Austria by the progressive pedagogue Elsa Köhler (Karlsson, 1998; Köhler, 1936). Köhler and others espoused the idea of universal stages of development and the view of *the child as nature*, providing the basic foundation of both pre-schooling and schooling, despite many other differences between these institutions (Dahlberg & Lenz Taguchi, 1994). Scientifically established norms have been used to diagnose deviations, allowing teachers in both pre-school and compulsory school to help each child reach the normal stages of development (Lenz Taguchi, 2000). Integration of children with "special needs" has therefore been a self-evident responsibility for all teachers.

Swedish family and education policies have often been said to reflect a unique view of the child (Martin Korpi, 2001; Skolverket, 2001a; Regeringskansliet, 1999). Today as in the past, the child is explicitly seen as a resource for society, and enjoys respect as a citizen with comparatively strong democratic rights. In this regard, a frequently cited 1979 law against child abuse proscribes corporal punishment of children by parents and guardians.

1.2.4 The pre-school as an ideal substitute home that "liberates" the child as well as the mother

The ideal of the free development of the child in accordance with his or her innate abilities called for a home-like environment with specific characteristics (Moberg, 1937). Such environments were created to impart middle-class ideals of hygiene, living conditions, cleanliness, manners and morals as well as providing care and creative teaching (Lenz Taguchi, 2000). Twice monthly "parents' nights" offered readings of works by Fröbel, Köhler and other pedagogues and discussions of child-rearing issues, hygiene, home-making and good grooming.

In 1934 the social democratic politician Alva Myrdal put forward the ideal of a full-day pre-school for all social classes called *Storbarnkammaren*, or nursery for all (Myrdal, 1934). This pre-school would provide education and care by well-educated, psychologically trained professionals or "substitute mothers", while the children's actual mothers were working (Dahlberg & Lenz Taguchi, 1994). Myrdal's vision was to help free the child from a home environment lacking in the spatial and material opportunities necessary for stimulating innate abilities to foster proper development and learning. At the same time she wanted to free mothers from the home and help them take responsibility for educating their children in a scientifically sound manner within an institution. Implicit in her vision, shared by other feminists, was another key argument for full-time pre-schooling, namely enabling women to take part in the public work force. The *Storbarnkammaren* was also conceived as a convenient local meeting place for parents, grandparents and neighbours, where children and grown-ups could mingle, play and talk at night after working hours. This was an important part of Myrdal's vision of equality, both between the sexes as well as between different social classes.

Parts of Myrdal's vision of equality and full-day pre-school took 40 years to materialise, requiring determined struggle within the feminist movement and a strong

national economy. While services were expanding rapidly, the waiting lists for full-day pre-schools seemed endless. Women could not wait to get out into the labour market. By the 1970s, the *Storbarnkammaren* as a meeting place was no longer a dream, as parents commonly had breakfast with their children in the pre-school before going to work, and stayed around for coffee in the afternoon when they came to pick up their children. Many pre-school teachers and nursery-educated staff look back on this period as the "golden age" of pre-schooling. Staff-child ratios were as low as they would ever be, with as few as three children to each staff member, compared with as many as six or seven children per adult today (Johansson & Åstedt, 1993; Lenz Taguchi, 2000). In 1990 staff-child ratios averaged about 4.4 children per full-time employee, rising to about 5.4 in 2001 (Martin Korpi, 2001). However, the staff-child ratios vary considerably across municipalities.

1.2.5 The expansion of pre-schooling

The number of children in early childhood services doubled between 1971 and 1975 (Lenz Taguchi, 2000). From 1970 to 1998, the number rose more than tenfold, from 71,000 to 720,000 (Regeringskansliet, 1999). Today, about 75 percent of children up to age five attend early childhood education institutions (pre-schools and family day-care homes). About 93 percent of six-year-olds attend the pre-school class in schools, adding a voluntary year of schooling instead of remaining in pre-school, family-day care or at home (Skolverket, 2001b).

However, the rapid expansion during the 1970s and 1980s came in for criticism, particularly over the lack of staff trained in the traditional approaches of Köhler, Gesell and others to serve as a reference for staff seeking to implement new national guidelines based on the ideas of Piaget and Erikson (Lenz Taguchi, 2000). In other words, it was not possible to educate enough trained staff in relation to the fast expansion. Untrained or newly educated staff found themselves at new pre-schools, where sometimes the only teacher with prior experience was the head of the pre-school and no longer worked directly with children. Old theories were simply dismissed in favour of the National Commission on Childcare guidelines. The new theories, however, of Piaget and Erikson were not properly contexualised and the interpretation was superficial. For example, the Commission's theories on "dialogue pedagogy" gave rise to norm-free, laissez-faire practices that did not integrate traditional norms and values. Fears were revived of the psychological risks of placing children under three in pre-schooling, similar to attitudes common about 70 years earlier towards working-class mothers who were seen as compromising their children's education by accepting philanthropic day care so they could work outside the home. In the 1970s, such notions were motivated less by concern for the children as by resistance to women's liberation, that is, to their desire to work even while their children were very young. No research has yet shown psychological damage from early participation in pre-schooling or long hours in pre-school activity. On the contrary, longitudinal studies have shown greater cognitive abilities and social skills in pre-school children who start at an early age and stay long hours (3 hours or more), compared with children who start at an older age and stay shorter hours (1-3 hours) (Andersson, 1989; Andersson, 1992; Andersson & Strander, 1998).

1.3 Pre-schooling as a right of the child

1.3.1 A 10-year process (1985-95) culminating in the right to pre-schooling from age one

Bengt Lindqvist was one of the first Ministers to give primacy to the idea that early childhood education and care are a right of the child rather than the parent. In 1985 he suggested that children from the age of 1½ years with working or studying parents should have the right to pre-schooling (Bill 1984/85:209). While the municipalities were previously obliged to follow a governmental expansion plan, they were now required to provide a place for every child 1½ years or older within three months of an

application by a working or studying parent. With the new intense pressure on the municipalities to provide pre-school services, the issue of costs became more crucial than children's right to pre-schooling. By the end of 1980 it was obvious that guaranteed pre-schooling for 1-1/2-year-olds was still a distant goal for many municipalities. A national economic recession combined with a lack of local political and financial will doomed the plan to failure. Lindqvist's bill of 1985 did not come into force until 10 years later, in 1995, when the goal seemed more comprehensible, and then was extended to children of one-year-old.

1.3.2 Right to pre-schooling for children with unemployed parents or parents on parental leave

At the end of the 1980s the overheated Swedish economy went into a deep crisis, which resulted in shrinking production and growing unemployment. In just the three years between 1991 and 1993, unemployment surged from a low of two percent to eight percent (Regeringskansliet, 1999). Unemployment has remained high and prompted a rethinking of the right to pre-schooling. The emergence of the idea that pre-schooling is a right of the child led to legislation in July 2001 requiring that children of unemployed parents have equal opportunity to at least three hours of pre-schooling per day. Six months later, children with parents on parental leave won the right to continue in pre-school, whereas previously they would have been taken out when their parents took leave to take care of a newborn sibling.

1.4 Pre-schooling guidelines preceding the first curriculum in 1998

Legislation on a pre-school curriculum was enacted for the first time in Sweden in 1998. Previously, from the 1940s, pre-school instruction was based on a number of major government investigations that produced extensively used documents. Three of these investigations, used as a basis for locally formulated official guidelines for pre-school services over the past 15 years, are discussed below.

1.4.1 The National Commission on Child Care (*Barnstugeutredningen*, SOU 1972:26 and 1972:27)

In 1968 the National Commission on Child Care was set up with some of the leading figures in the pre-school movement. Their report would become a highly influential document for the new generation of pre-school personnel in a period of rapid expansion (SOU 1972:26 and 1972:27). The Commission drew on Elsa Köhler's and Arnold Gesell's developmental theories and developed this thinking into a constructivist, social and interactionist approach including family life and psychoanalytic theory (i.e., J. S. Bruner, J. Piaget, E.H. Erikson and H. Mead). The recommended pedagogical approach revolved around dialogue between teacher and child, with the child enjoying great freedom to choose materials, themes and activities (Schyl-Bjurman & Strömberg-Lind 1976). The teacher's role was to provide support and stimulation in order to fulfil the needs of the child. The Commission also sought to merge half-day pre-schooling (Kindergarten/*lekskolan*) with full-day day care (day-care centres/*daghem*) into one institution and concept – the pre-school. The aim was to close the gap between the institution based solely on pedagogical learning activities (*lekskola*) and that based mainly on care (*daghem*), and create the ideal union of care and pedagogy. Half-day and full-day services differed greatly in staff training and working practices. The integration of the two would be rather painful for many teachers in half-day services, since their professional experience was not valued equally with that of young pre-school teachers trained in the approaches recommended by the Commission (Lenz Taguchi, 2000). The Commission's report was the first extensive official document on the goals, organisation, content and practice of early childhood education, and laid the foundation for pre-schooling in the latter part of the 20th century. As a result of the Commission, the first law affecting pre-school children in Sweden was enacted in 1975. The law, *Förskoleiagen*, stipulated that every six-year-old had the right to 525 hours per year of state-funded but locally run pre-schooling.

1.4.2 "Education through teamwork" (Utbildning i samspel, SOU 1975:67)

An investigation into the training of pre-school teachers was carried out in 1975, resulting in a report entitled "Education Through Teamwork" that affirmed that no formal difference should exist between the tasks of differently trained staff within the pre-school. The pre-school teacher was responsible for the pedagogical planning of activities, which would be performed on an equal basis by day-care attendants and pre-school teachers as well as untrained staff. They formed a "work team", a non-hierarchical organisation that would set a democratic example for children. Pre-school teachers who in half-day pre-schools had enjoyed regular hours from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm now had to share responsibilities equally, sometimes having to open the pre-school as early as 6:30 am or close as late as 6:30 pm. At many institutions, very few trained pre-school teachers were present during the expansion years of the 1970s and '80s. While the ideal pre-school today has a majority of trained teaching staff, many still do not, largely for financial reasons, even though the salary of a pre-school teacher is not much higher than that of a day-care attendant.

The shift to "work teams" had wide-ranging effects that could be discussed at length. In the presence context the significance of the change relates to the process of integrating pre-schooling with schooling, as discussed later.

1.4.3 The education programme for pre-schooling (*Pedagogiska programmet*, Socialstyrelsen 1987:3)

The 1985 legislation (Bill 1984/85:209) enshrining the right of the 1-1/2-year-old child of working and studying parents to placement in pre-schooling also appointed a Commission to formulate a more modern programme. More than 10 years had passed since the National Commission on Child Care (*Barnstugeutredningen*) of 1972. Since the basis of the education programme for pre-schooling (Socialstyrelsen, 1987:3) was the child's right to early childhood education, the services for children's development and learning had great pedagogical importance. In line with ongoing decentralisation, the programme defined a set of frameworks aimed particularly at municipal officials in their planning and development of guidelines for local services. Discarding the one-on-one dialogue pedagogy espoused by the National Commission on Child Care (1972:26; 1972:27), the new programme re-emphasised the importance of working with groups of children. Theme-oriented activities, pioneered in the 1930s by Köhler under the term "centres of interest", were further developed, reinforcing a long tradition in pre-schooling. A pedagogical programme for leisure-time/activity centres was also formulated and published in 1988 (Socialstyrelsen, 1988:7).

1.5 Important notions and reforms preceding the integration of pre-school and compulsory schooling

1.5.1 Reverse logic: Bring pre-school pedagogy into compulsory school!

Why did the Nordic countries and especially Sweden take so long to allow children to start school before age seven? In most other countries starting school at six or even five has hardly been controversial. The general idea in Sweden, however, was to offer an *ideal childhood* to the extent possible, so that starting school was seen as the end of "the golden age of childhood"! The resulting strong resistance towards an earlier school-starting age was overcome only by having *pre-school pedagogy dominate at least the first year of schooling*. The Minister of Education in the 1980s, Bengt Göransson, said: "I want pre-schooling to be a spearhead into schooling" (Martin Korpi, 2001).

State directives have always stressed coordination and cooperation between pre-school and compulsory schooling. The idea has been to make the transition between the two as smooth as possible for children, by bringing the two pedagogies closer together. With the extension of the holistic view of the child into schooling, children enjoy continuity and a sense of self-assurance in the new learning institution. The holistic

approach puts equal emphasis on all aspects of the child's development - the emotional, social and physical (i.e., motor abilities), as well as cognitive. The different learning environments and cultures were expected to complement rather than contradict each other during the first years of schooling. The *rhetorical* logic was, thus, that pre-schooling was to *influence* schooling, rather than make children start compulsory schooling earlier. In addition to this the full day pre-schools were considered better suited than schools to the modern society and family with their full day care and holistic view of learning and development.

1.5.2 Early coordination strategies between pre-school and compulsory school

Coordination strategies between pre-school and compulsory schooling, initially voluntary, started to become mandatory from the 1940s. The School Commission of 1947 (SOU 1947:11) required pre-school teachers to judge whether children were sufficiently mature to start compulsory schooling. They were also required to teach six-year-olds skills needed for schooling such as sitting still, taking turns to speak, hand-raising in group settings, dressing and tying shoelaces, and walking and talking properly. More recently, the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen, 1987:3; Socialstyrelsen, 1990) stipulated that pre-school institutions are responsible for preparing children for schooling, but gave no clear instructions.

Numerous local coordination projects were carried out through the 1970-1980s. These overwhelmingly tended to be administrative and organisational in nature rather than attitudinal. The most common programme involved having pre-school children visit their prospective compulsory schools once a week to become familiar with the physical environment, the routines and rules and their future teachers. Innovations in cooperative pedagogical practice were extremely rare (Dahlberg, Krook & Williams-Olsson, 1973; Gran, 1979; SOU 1994:45).

Most pre-school teachers have faced a constant conflict when trying to stimulate all aspects of their six-year-olds' development while simultaneously preparing them for the entirely different learning environment of schooling (Holmlund, 1996).

1.5.3 Flexible school starting age introduced in 1991

The Minister of Education at this time, Göran Persson, introduced legislation to allow a flexible school-starting age in 1991. The rationale for lower starting ages was initially more financial than pedagogical. In the 1960s the issue was to get more women into the work force, while the 1980s saw a need to counter low school enrolment resulting in teachers being laid off and schools shutting down. The Ministry of Finance suggested a lowering of the school starting age, but met with strong resistance. Kjell Olof Feldt, who was Minister of Finance at the time, recalls that the Ministry of Education claimed that neither the school system nor Swedish children were pedagogically and psychologically "mature enough" to handle a younger school starting age. The Education Minister at the time, Bengt Göransson, supported the idea, but others in the ministry resisted it simply because it came from the Ministry of Finance, according to Feldt (Feldt, 1991).

The question arose again in 1990, when the Ministry of Health and Welfare itself advocated lowering the school-starting age. The municipalities had begun struggling financially to achieve the goals of the 1985 Bill guaranteeing placement for all children of working and studying parents from 1½ years of age. Education Minister Persson introduced a Bill (1990/91:115), passed in June 1991 by the Swedish Parliament, establishing a flexible school-starting age allowing parents to opt to put their six-year-olds in first grade. The municipalities had to provide places for them, and had until 1997 to prepare placements for *all* six-year-olds. In the legislation, Persson urged teaching staff to use a holistic perspective with the children, and further coordination between pre-schools and compulsory schools. He set the following preconditions for a flexible school-starting age:

- New ideas for teacher education and in-service training of teachers. (A Bill on Renewal of Teacher Training, 1999/2000:135, was adopted by Parliament in 2000)
- Integration of leisure-time/activity centres in schooling;
- Removal of all remaining obstacles preventing municipalities from taking full responsibility for schoolteachers' employment, as laid down in the Bill of 1989/90:41;
- Support for municipalities in integrating local municipal boards for schooling and pre-schooling into one board and a joint local office; and
- Formulation and passage of a joint curriculum for schooling and pre-schooling (Bill 1995/96:206).

The National Agency for Education carried out an evaluation of the flexible school-starting age in 1994, finding that opportunities for parents to put their six-year-olds in school varied widely across municipalities. Implementation strategies varied, but generally, the right to formal schooling for six-year-olds was not yet fully implemented, with three years remaining to complete the reform by the 1997 deadline (Skolverket, 1994).

1.5.4 Leisure-time/activity centres are integrated into compulsory schooling

Leisure-time/activity centres were physically separate from school buildings before 1991. The centres, together with pre-schools, belonged to the government's social policy for the family rather than educational policy. School-age childcare was integrated into schooling physically as well as administratively under the Bill on flexible school-starting age (1990/91:115). The services were moved into school buildings, and schoolteachers became the co-workers and colleagues of recreational instructors and day-care attendants.

A key rationale for this decision, along with financial and efficiency considerations, was the need to offer families full-day services in one location – "all-day education and care" – similar to pre-school services. In the Bill outlining these changes (1990/91:115), the Minister of Schools emphasised that the flexible school start would probably spark increased demand for school-age childcare from parents with six-year-olds in compulsory school. He also declared that leisure-time/activity centres would become an important support for schooling. The official report on leisure-time/activity centres (SOU:1991:54) gave equal emphasis to financial and pedagogical reasons for integrating premises, staff and resources. As a result, school-age childcare became a complement to the school as well as to the home.

Specific research into the integration of school-age childcare with schooling has documented the difficulties of recreational instructors coping with new responsibilities during the school day, while carrying out their regular work at leisure-time/activity centres both before and after school hours. Recreational instructors are becoming auxiliary teachers supporting regular schoolteachers, who for their part have experienced no change in their professional identity since the integration (Hansen, 1999; Calander, 1999).

1.5.5 Introducing pre-school pedagogy into school curricula

An investigation (SOU 1994:45) was published in 1994 suggesting that the Swedish school was not sufficiently "mature" to embrace a holistic view of the child and provide a satisfactory learning environment for all children with individual needs. This document was the first step towards a joint curriculum for pre-schooling and schooling, and another attempt to determine whether the compulsory school system could be extended from nine years to 10. Discussions of lowering the school-starting age were reopened, alongside considerations of an upward extension in the system. The investigation concluded that biological age was not a crucial factor, but rather the child's intellectual, social and emotional maturity. It said teaching in schools needed to

become "child-mature", or flexible in relation to each child's learning style and needs. The investigation also recommended integration between pre-schooling and schooling to make such teaching possible. It advocated the work team as a superior organisational practice, enabling pre-school teachers, recreational instructors and regular schoolteachers to exchange methods and ways of understanding children's needs. The foundation for a new way of working in the lower ages of schooling was to be established through the merger of two different traditions, with the child seen as a co-constructor of culture and knowledge (Dahlberg & Lenz Taguchi, 1994).

1.5.6 From rule-based centralisation to goal-based decentralisation

The process of integration was probably facilitated by the shift from centralised to decentralised forms of regulation that has occurred since the mid-1980s, with "governing by rules" giving way to "governing by goals". In 1990 an important step towards decentralisation was taken when responsibility for employment of compulsory and secondary schoolteachers, as well as upper secondary schoolteachers, shifted from the state to municipalities (Bill 1989/90:41). The state began to see the governing of schools as goal-based. It wanted to integrate facilities and staff providing schooling and school-age childcare – schools and leisure-time/activity centres. This made possible both co-operation and collective responsibility for children during the entire workday, as well as the effective use of resources. Teachers have taken on administrative responsibilities, and all categories of teacher have the same employer. Previously, when the state and the municipalities employed teachers and recreational instructors, respectively, cooperation was difficult.

Some teachers initially saw being employees of the municipalities as a lowering of their status, but much of this resistance has disappeared over the past decade. Teachers are happy with the help they get in classrooms from recreational instructors. Many teachers have used the opportunity to change jobs between municipalities, raising their salaries substantially. Competition between municipalities for teaching staff and other personnel has increased, sometimes to the advantage of children and their families, sometimes not. *Flexibility* and *change,* no longer mere visions, have become day-to-day concepts.

The many rationales for the shift to goal-based regulation from centralised regulation have been studied extensively elsewhere (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 1986; Lundgren, 1990). The essential point here is that many municipalities had begun addressing the integration of pre-schooling and schooling long before the formal decision to bring early childhood education and care into the Ministry of Education and Science in 1996. Then, because of decentralised regulation, the steps taken and solutions chosen varied widely across the 289 municipalities. Many municipal offices already had a joint pre-school, school board and administration, as well as strong cooperation between school forms. Other municipalities still had far to go.

1.5.7 Summary of the context and factors preceding integration

Following is a summary of the main factors behind the decision to integrate:

- A political will and interest in the effectiveness of pre-school pedagogy in developing and educating the child and giving children a strong start in all aspects of life;
- The 1985 Bill on the right to pre-school services for every child, from age one and a half, whose parents were working or studying (Bill 84/1985:209);
- Decentralisation processes in governing and administering municipal services since the mid-1980s -- "from governing by rules to governing by goals" (Bill 1988/89:4);
- Municipalities became the formal employers of schoolteachers in 1990, which meant that pre-school and after-school service staff would have the same employers as regular schoolteachers (Bill 1989/90:41).

- The 1991 law on flexible school starting age (Bill 90/91:115);
- The integration of leisure-time centres into schooling in 1991 (Bill 1990/91:115);
- The 1994 study (SOU 1994:45) preparing a joint curriculum for pre-schooling and schooling; and
- Legislation from 1995 on the right to pre-school services for every one-year-old child of working or studying parents, based on the 1985 legislation.

II. The integration of early childhood education into a universal system of lifelong learning

2.1 Rationales for integration

2.1.1 Pedagogical and financial rationales

Persson, as Prime Minister in 1996, declared that Sweden must become a nation of knowledge – a *kunskapsnation*. To realise this goal, Sweden must improve the entire educational system, from the pre-school to the university level, the former Education Minister said. He also stated that pre-schooling should be an instrument for *improving* the crucial first year of compulsory schooling (Martin Korpi, 2001). His insistence on a lifelong learning perspective was strongly supported by the School Minister, Ylva Johansson. The natural step was to integrate pre-schooling with schooling.

The rationales for integrating early childhood education with pre-schooling under a single ministry, especially the Ministry of Education and Science, are best understood in two steps. First, it is necessary to recall that since 1944, all early childhood education and care services had been under *one* single ministry – the Ministry of Health and Welfare. As a result, when the decision was made in 1996 to integrate early childhood education and care with the compulsory school system, only two ministries were involved. The move from the Ministry of Health and Welfare to the Ministry of Education and Science shifted the focus on the purpose of pre-schooling, from social and family to educational. While pre-schooling retained its dual purpose – care and pedagogy – the emphasis shifted from care to pedagogy. At the ministerial level, the personnel concerned with pre-schooling at the Ministry of Health and Welfare simply changed their workplace, moving over to the Ministry of Education and Science. Thus the integration of ministerial auspices was quite undramatic.

The second step is to look at the decision in relation to the context of schooling and pre-schooling in Sweden and the reforms preceding the integration, outlined in the first section of this report. The rationales can be summarised as follows:

- Transforming Sweden into a "knowledge nation", by improving the whole educational system, from pre-schooling to university.
- Transforming the education system into a system of lifelong learning, by reforming the compulsory school system and taking a holistic view of the child and learning in pre-school pedagogy.
- Legislating municipalities to provide pre-school classes for 6-year olds, thus giving access to 10 years of schooling, of which 9 years (still) are compulsory.
- Financial rationales.

From a wider, global perspective, the decision to integrate at the level of ministries can be understood as a response to increased global competition for knowledge and skills (Martin Korpi, 2001; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 1999). To be able to compete in emerging world markets, Sweden needs a high level of education across society as a whole, for people in general to be able to take part in an increasingly skilled work force. A high level of excellence is needed to develop new products and knowledge for different markets. The idea of lifelong learning corresponds closely with Swedish pre-school and school traditions. Sweden, as a social-democratic state for most

of the 20th century, has injected abundant political will and state funds into *"education for all"*. Education has long been understood as a cornerstone of the welfare state. The main thrust, however, has been the provision of adult education and enabling people to complete secondary and upper secondary education. Associations and unions have provided extensive educational activities and in-service training programmes for their members. With today's information society and global competition for knowledge and skills, interest has also focused on the youngest members of society. The integration of pre-schooling and schooling into one ministry, with 100% financial and pedagogical responsibility, was logical in the lifelong learning perspective, particularly given the scope of the services involved. The merger offered a more coherent command of the issues, which were less in danger of "falling between two stools," says Barbara Martin Korpi, Senior Adviser in the Ministry of Education. Ultimately, a single organisation became responsible for evaluation and quality control (Martin Korpi, 2001).

Financial motivations were an important precondition to the integration process. As discussed earlier, there was a national-level financial rationale for the expansion of early childhood education and care. The same goes for lifelong learning. Moreover, since on a per-child basis compulsory schooling is far cheaper than pre-schooling in Sweden, it became highly attractive financially for municipalities to "upgrade" six-year-olds to schooling after 1995 when the Bill of 1985 was finally enacted. The Bill (1984/85:209), discussed above, requires the municipalities to provide pre-schooling for all children of working and studying parents from the age one within three months of application.

The financial and pedagogical rationales for the decision to integrate early childhood education and care with compulsory schooling were polarised: less expensive whole day education and care in school and a risk of pre-schools' becoming "educationised"; or, as a result of a successful integration, schools becoming "pre-schoolized". Transforming schooling with a more holistic view of children and learning, however, was understood as generally "good" and desirable. To oppose this, said the former Director-General of the National Agency for Education during this time, Ulf P. Lundgren, *"would have been equivalent to swearing in church"* (2001). However contradictory it may seem, one important way of understanding what has happened is that both "educationization" of 6-year-olds as well as "pre-schoolization" of schooling have taken place. (This is discussed later under consequences and impacts.)

2.2 The process and transition at ministerial level

2.2.1. A basically undramatic transition at the ministerial level

The transition at the ministerial level was basically undramatic. The department responsible for early childhood education and care at the Ministry of Health and Welfare was transferred to the Ministry of Education and Science without much difficulty (Martin Korpi, 2001; Lundgren, 2001). Integrated groups were formed from the personnel who moved from the Ministry of Health and Welfare and those already at the Ministry of Education. Thus, for all investigations, discussions and planning concerning ages 0-16, pre-schooling officials now work together with their compulsory schooling counterparts. Only the department for upper secondary school (grades 10 through 12) – *gymnasieskolan* – formed a group of its own (Martin Korpi, 2001).

The National Agency for Education invited pre-schooling specialists to take part in a special council as part of the integration process. The aim was to train staff at the National Agency for Education in pre-school issues, as well as to influence their practices with knowledge and ideas from the pre-school field (Lundgren, 2001). The former Director-General of the National Agency for Education, Ulf P. Lundgren, stated that a formal evaluation of the process showed that overall the Agency had acquired new knowledge about the field of early childhood education and care (Lundgren, 2001).

Lundgren, Agency officials and staff travelled across the country to inform local municipal officials about the reforms and to make them "visible" to practitioners. The municipalities that had not yet integrated their political and administrative organisations

were given support to do so. Central and municipal officials discussed ways to understand pre-schooling in a lifelong learning perspective (Lundgren, 2001).

In a decentralised system it is up to the municipalities to initiate local implementation projects. The National Agency had no funds to start local projects at this time; while some municipalities had started extensive projects, others had not (Lundgren, 2001).

2.2.2 Forms of resistance at the central level

At the ministerial level, the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Education and Science had been collaborating for a few years in several investigations aimed at lowering the school-starting age, integrating the two school forms or both. Political rhetoric was dominated by the idea that pre-schooling should influence schooling, rather than the reverse. Many at the Ministry of Health and Welfare feared that pre-school pedagogy would lose its prestige, at least symbolically and politically, with the integration (Martin Korpi, 2001). Early childhood education and care enjoyed high status in social policies throughout the 20th century while under the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and was an area in which both politicians and officials took great pride. But fear that pre-schooling would lose its status has proved unfounded. Since the integration, the issues of pre-schooling and children have been high on the political agenda with at least two new reforms -- the maximum fee reform (2002) and that introducing "universal" pre-school for four- and five-year-olds (2003).

The strongest resistance to integration came from the union representing day-care attendants over concerns that their profession would be eroded by the "educationalisation" of pre-schooling. Pre-school teachers' unions had stated a goal, dating back to the early 1980s, that all staff must eventually have a university degree. They argued that since the pre-school is above all a pedagogical institution, its staff required qualifications beyond training in health and care. The issue of status and professionalisation accompanied the ever-present question of whether pre-schooling was essentially a matter of babysitting/care or education/pedagogy. As a profession, pre-schooling lost status from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, after a short "honeymoon" period in the late 1970s and early 1980s when it was seen as socially and politically important. It was during this short period that about 12% of the staff were men. Today in the big cities, the vision of pre-schools enjoying the same status as schools is far from a reality, with only one in three staff members having a university degree. Only two to three percent of pre-school staff are men.

2.2.3 The pre-school class

The idea of a voluntary year of schooling for six-year-olds in pre-schools was proposed in 1997 after another bid to lower the school-starting age from seven to six years was rejected. In the Bill of 1997/98:6, Göran Persson as Prime Minister proposed another form of integration, in which municipalities would be obliged to start "pre-school classes" for all six-year-olds. The pre-school class legally became part of the compulsory school system in 1998, in part to support the integration of pre-school and schooling. The municipalities had only one year to implement the new law, which was seen as an extension of 1991 legislation on the flexible school start. During this short time span, some municipalities practically "forced" a large number of six-year-olds who were not already voluntarily enrolled in schooling into the "pre-school class". This is how, in practice, the school-starting age was lowered in many municipalities. The reform can thereby be understood as a "legitimate" way for many municipalities to save money by « pushing » more children as quickly as possible to the less expensive school-system. On the other hand, financial factors may in fact have been of paramount importance in pushing many municipalities towards necessary organisational integration at the local level, making more effective, comprehensible and holistic organisations possible.

2.2.4 The first national curriculum for pre-schooling (Lpfö98)

The first national curriculum for pre-schooling (SOU 1997:157), enacted by Parliament in 1998, clearly stated that pre-schooling was the first step in a lifelong learning process. Pre-schooling should provide care and stimulate development and learning, and must be organised in such a way that parents can work full-time or study. In this document, learning has the same status as development, which was an important shift in Swedish pre-schooling. The curriculum specifies the overall orientation and goals of pre-schooling, but does not state how to achieve them. The municipalities and teaching staff develop local plans covering the approaches and methods they find effective for attaining the goals. The national curriculum lists the following goals and guidelines:

- respecting norms and values;
- fostering development and learning;
- encouraging the influence of children themselves;
- ensuring cooperation between pre-school and home; and
- fostering interaction among pre-school classes, compulsory schools and leisure-time centres.

The pre-school curriculum emphasises the same basic values as the compulsory school curriculum, notably care and consideration towards others, solidarity, gender equality and tolerance. The curriculum also instructs staff to counteract stereotype sex-role behaviour in the children.

The pre-school curriculum proceeds from the assumption that the children are competent and constantly seeking to improve their understanding of the world around them. The pre-school is expected to make the most of this thirst for knowledge and lay the foundations of a lifelong learning process. In sum, the curriculum states that pre-schools should be fun, secure and instructive for all children who attend them (Skolverket, 2001a).

2.2.5 A revised curriculum for schooling (the revised Lpo94)

A definite shift from *coordination* between the two school forms to *integration* was formulated in the government Bill of 1995/96:206. The Bill sought to introduce a joint curriculum based on the ideal of lifelong learning and a common understanding of children, knowledge and learning. The BOSK Pre-school and School Commission was appointed, and proposed a revised curriculum for pre-school class, activity-centres and compulsory school (ages 6 to 16) (SOU 1997:21). The Commission incorporated conceptual changes reflected in the substitution of the terms *child and youth* for *pupil, pedagogue* for all kinds of teachers, *learning activities* for *teaching*, and *pedagogical practices* for *school*.

Only a few of these terminology changes were made, primarily due to resistance from teachers' unions that rejected the use of the term *pedagogue* to cover all teachers. The aim of the revised curriculum, namely to support the integration of pre-school classes and leisure-time/activity centres in the school system, was clearly stated. The revised formulations entailed a new view of children, knowledge and learning. The concept of *teaching* was replaced to a large extent, but not completely, by *learning*, reflecting the idea that children are active in their own learning processes, and need challenging learning environments. Other new elements were *learning to discuss, argue for and negotiate*, as well as *performing* and *speaking in public*. Alternative ways of expressing oneself and learning, other than through reading and writing, were emphasised, such as the use of music, drama, body movement, drawing, painting and multi-media. New concepts were added, such as *learning through play*, *creative activities*, *experimental* and *investigating learning* as well as *care*. *Teacher* became the common term for all kinds of teachers and instructors within the school system. Recreational instructors and pre-school teachers could now teach in the compulsory school system if they had proper qualifications in relation to content.

2.2.6 The maximum fee reform of 2001

At the turn of the new millennium, pre-schooling was the last part of the general welfare system that allowed the municipalities to set their own fees, taking into account hours of attendance and family income. In practice, this meant that families with similar incomes paid widely differing fees across municipalities. A government Bill proposed a maximum fee for all kinds of early childhood education and care, with the result that pre-schooling costs have been the same in all municipalities since January 2002. Fees have generally been lower for all families, including single parent-families. In social-democratic thinking this change is a centralising regulation and a major step towards a general welfare system (Martin Korpi, 2001). In local municipal boards, however, a majority of elected politicians voted in favour of a maximum fee, in spite of the cost involved in the reform, yet another autonomous municipal decision being declines. The reform was an important step towards a national educational school system incorporating a universal pre-school for all children from the age of four, to be implemented in January 2003. It can also be understood as an important step towards equality, since the fee is no longer a decisive factor in determining parents', especially mothers', working hours.

2.2.7 A universal pre-school

From January 2003 all Swedish children from age four will have the right to attend pre-schooling 525 hours per year at no cost. The right is limited to certain time periods corresponding to the two semesters of compulsory schooling. The entitlement is seen as an important step towards a universal pre-school in the lifelong learning perspective.

2.2.8 A summary of actions required by the decision at the central level

The decision to integrate pre-schooling under the Ministry of Education and Science in 1996 entailed a number of changes in terms of legislation and curricula. Only minor regulatory changes were made since the Ministry of Education and Science is goal-driven, and its goals are evaluated by the National Agency for Education. The main responsibility for evaluation, however, lies with the decentralised municipalities.

Following is a summary of the actions required by the decision at the central level, discussed at length earlier.

- January 1998 - The National Agency for Health and Welfare – *Socialstyrelsen* – handed over its responsibilities to the National Agency for Education – "Skolverket".
- January 1998 - Legislation on early childhood education and care was transferred from the Social Act into the Education Act.
- January 1998 – Legislation made the pre-school class part of the compulsory school system, enabling children to have 10 years of schooling in the system, of which nine years are compulsory (Bill 1997/98:6).
- August 1998 - Pre-school teachers received the legal right to teach in the compulsory school system under the new Education Act.
- August 1998 - A curriculum for pre-schooling (Lpfö98) was launched by government decree (Bill 1997/98:94).
- August 1998 - A revised mandatory curriculum for schooling, which includes pre-school classes and leisure-time/activity centres, was introduced (the revised Lpo94).
- July 2001 - Municipalities were obliged to provide places at pre-school or in a home day-care nursery for at least three hours per day to children up to age five whose parents are unemployed. From January 1, 2002, this obligation has also covered children whose parents are on parental leave because of a younger sibling.

- In 2001 a Parliamentary Commission into the Education Act was appointed to consider how to harmonise and integrate pre-school legislation with school legislation, focussing on strengthening children's rights and making the Act more goal-oriented.
- August 2001 - A new teacher-training programme was launched. A Bill entitled "A Renewed Teacher Education" (Bill1999/2000:135) proposed a single teacher qualification, but with different lengths and contents chosen and designed by students themselves, after choosing to work with younger children aged 1-12 or older children. Therefore the length of the education varies between 3 ½ - 5 years of education. All trainee teachers study together and do practice teaching in schools, pre-schools and leisure-time/activity centres for 1-1½ years.
- January 2002 - A maximum fee for early childhood education and care services was introduced for all families irrespective of income level.
- January 2003 - A universal cost-free pre-school for children aged four and five for 525 hours per year is to be legislated.

2.3 The process and transition at the local level

2.3.1 Trends in transition at the local level

Martin Korpi stated in an interview that integration of pre-schooling and schooling under the ideal of lifelong learning would face considerable difficulties, conflict and resistance, unless early childhood education and care was made generally available to all families (Martin Korpi, 2001). In her view, the expansion of services was a precondition for successful integration. It is difficult to generalise about the transition processes in Sweden's 289 highly decentralised municipalities. As mentioned above, most had already started to modify their political and administrational responsibilities and routines many years in advance of the formal ministerial integration. Municipalities usually had a pre-school and school board, or a board for children and the young. These boards drew up local pre-school and school plans, sometimes with highly specific goals for learning and care, and made financial decisions. The goals were determined in accordance with the national curriculum but evaluated in relation to both national and local criteria.

As the municipalities became the employer of not only recreational instructors and early childhood personnel but also schoolteachers, their autonomy for decisions about these different groups of teachers increased. They became autonomous in setting financial priorities and determining the levels of teacher's salary. They could also make autonomous decisions on the management of teachers and pedagogical practices. Another change brought by decentralisation was that each school or pre-school was free to formulate and design its own pedagocial and methodological profile. In addition, families in the early 1990s were able to choose between pre-school or school, rather than being assigned to the closest institution available. In many municipalities families paid per hour of attendance in early childhood services. Now, for budgeting purposes, each individual pre-school of school can count on ever child in its district to provide a set portion of its revenue. (Under the maximum fee reform implemented in January 2002, parents can choose a pre-school, but they pay a maximum fee irrespective of the hours of attendance.)

The local reforms, couched in the neo-liberal language of consumer choice, were portrayed as ways to make the services more "consumer-friendly" and cost-effective. To some extent these reforms brought about healthy improvements in care and pedagogy, while also increasing the effectiveness of human and financial resources. Some pre-schools and schools began to cooperate in new ways as a part of their consumer "profile", a result of local competition to persuade parents to enroll their children. Such coordination strategies, as well as the transfer of six-year-olds from pre-schools into schools, were financially attractive in most municipalities.

2.3.2 Resistance and processes at the local level

At the level of municipalities, the debate over integration focused on the conflict between pedagogical and economic issues. Another conflict concerned the professional identity of different groups. The conflicts and resistance took various forms. While some municipalities viewed integration as a way of saving money, others saw it primarily as a pedagogical reform aimed at providing better schooling as well as pre-schooling.

Some compulsory schoolteachers were still displeased over a perceived loss of status after becoming employees of the municipalities, with pre-school and leisure-time/activity centre personnel as colleagues. Some teachers quitted, while others moved to new teaching positions in another municipal. The professional status of pre-school staff, on the other hand, was already deflated as the pedagogical quality of their services was compromised by growing class sizes during Sweden's economic recession in the 1990s. Both schooling and pre-schooling experienced severe financial cuts, even as children spent longer days in pre-schools and leisure-time/activity centres while their parents worked longer hours to raise their incomes. Some high-profile pre-school paedophilia scandals drove men away from the field, with the proportion of male staff dropping from 12 percent to under three percent today. Pre-school staff could look to integration and the promise of a new curriculum to compensate for some of this damage, as well as potential new career paths within their field of work.

Academics were the staunchest critics of integration, voicing fears that pre-school pedagogy would be undermined. An extensive study in Norway had shown that little integration was actually taking place in schools offering pre-school classes (Haug, 1992). Jointly drafted local documents had very little to do with actual practice, and Haug concluded that pre-school teachers and schoolteachers were merely performing poor "imitations" of each other. Some, he contended, simply continued doing what they always had done. Swedish studies began to show the same tendencies, fuelling debate over the prospects for true integration given the status relations between the various professional groups. (The results of evaluations are discussed in Section 2.4, on consequences and impacts.)

Another source of opposition to integration was the *Kommunförbundet* (National Union of Municipalities) – the central organisation of municipalities – which rejected the 1995 proposal of integration of pre-schooling, activity-centres and schooling (Bill 1995/96 :206), citing financial reasons. They said the reform was desirable, but that funding for implementation had been insufficient. With the pre-school class reform of in 1998, the municipalities were effectively forced to add another voluntary (for children) school year by constructing a pre-school class, without receiving additional financial support from the government. In actual fact, however, it was cheaper to have the six-year-olds in the pre-school class.

2.3.3 Evaluation and reflections on resistances and processes at the local level

An evaluation by the National Agency of Education in 1999 found less resistance in municipalities where pedagogical, professional and financial factors coalesced (Skolverket, 1999). Conflicts arose when financial factors overshadowed pedagogical considerations, for example when pedagogues demanded more financial support than was available. Generally, however, during the economic recession, financial and pedagogical motivations both tended to favour the goal of integration. After the financial "golden days" of the 1970s and 1980s, professionals tried to be more financially responsible. Resistance was further minimised when responsibility for finance, organisation, administration and actual pedagogical implementation was decentralised to the same individuals. Although documentation is lacking, it appears that decision-making in municipalities may have become more realistic and holistic. The relative success of integration, and diminishing resistance towards the reform, may be attributable to the dual responsibility for financial administration and pedagogy. On

the other hand, pre-schooling expanded more slowly than expected after the 1985 Bill, perhaps reflecting silent resistance by some municipalities. Evaluations of the integration (discussed below in Section 2.4) do not reveal across-the-board success, but widespread problems and difficulties. However, resistance or the lack thereof was clearly specific to each municipality.

2.4 Consequences and impacts

2.4.1. Consequences and impacts at the local level

Today, the role of the National Agency for Education is to ensure that the national objectives for pre-schooling and schooling are achieved. The agency supervises and evaluates performance, as well as initiating research. The state has made no specific extra funding available to the municipalities for the integration of pre-schooling and schooling, although some money has been available for some of the preliminary steps. Many of the municipalities needed extra financial support to implement the law of 1995.

Local government has been primarily responsible for evaluating the consequences and impacts of the integration. The National Agency for Education, however, carried out an extensive evaluation, tracking 30 schools in 10 municipalities over three years (Skolverket, 1999, 2000, 2001c). The study found a preponderance of traditional school-oriented practices, with a traditional view of knowledge reflected in the organisation of learning activities into set subjects and time periods, rather than an interdisciplinary thematic or project-oriented organisation. Classrooms are not well-suited or laid out for different kinds of play activities, even in pre-school classes for six-year-olds, it says, lamenting that signs of a new understanding of learning remain scarce. The National Agency for Education concludes that most municipalities lack knowledge and understanding of the integration reform despite several information campaigns. They also lack knowledge of the content and aims of the revised curriculum. These shortcomings were found at the political and administrative level as well as within schools and among parents. The Agency faulted many municipalities for failing to conduct their own evaluations during the process.

The evaluation found little change in pedagogical practices at the 30 schools studied. The most highly integrated work teams were found in municipalities where pre-school teachers, recreational instructors and schoolteachers had been working together for longer periods and had specifically scheduled time to discuss their practices together. Such discussions have had a positive impact on the organisation and quality of the children's learning practices.

Many schools attribute the lack of extensive pedagogical changes to a worsening financial situation leading to larger class sizes and smaller teaching staff. Some simply note that change of such magnitude takes time.

2.4.2 State-initiated measures in response to the local evaluations

On the basis of the evaluations, the National Agency for Education proposed the following state-initiated measures:

- Harmonisation of the legislation on pre-schooling and schooling (A state initiated investigation launched in 2001) (Commission, SOU 2002:121)
- Implementation in relation to integration and the revised curriculum at the local level and in teacher education/training;
- Developmental projects in municipalities, locally initiated but funded by the Agency, in order to implement the intentions of integration and goals of the curriculum;
- Research on pedagogical practice within schools; and

- Training of headmasters and teachers through dialogue.

The Agency proposed the following measures at the local level:

- In-service-training of all staff on equal terms;
- More time and support for discussion of practices within work teams;
- Supporting new staff – pre-school teachers and recreational instructors – in schooling;
- Evaluations of school management and their competence; and
- Evaluation of integrated school forms – leisure-time/activity centres and pre-school classes in compulsory schools.

2.4.3 Consequences and impacts of the integration described in research

Research into the integration has found that the various categories of teachers see children, knowledge and learning, as well as pedagogical practices, in different ways. Their habits and traditions are largely unconscious but are reflected in how they organise time, space and materials, talk to children, colleagues and parents, and analyse children's thoughts and behaviour. For example, some may view children as being wholly dependent on adults, while others see them as competent, independent learners. Each category of teachers view their approach as "natural" and thus appropriate (Munkhammar, 2001). Research suggests that recreational instructors, pre-school teachers and day-care attendants need to readjust such pre-conceived notions in order to cooperate in integration practices or any process of change. Such processes generally need both specifically allocated time and some degree of supervision (Lenz Taguchi, 2000; Munkhammar, 2001). An integrated practice can bring strong but opposing pedagogical "fields of power" face-to-face which must seek ways of harmonising their activities. To make matters worse, one tradition or "team" is often playing a "home game" and enjoys much higher status (Munkhammar, 2001). In the Swedish context, integration between pre-schooling and schooling has been seen as the predominantly "female" culture of "pedagogy as care" in pre-schooling, merging with schooling as a predominantly and traditional "male" academic and subjectorganised culture (Lenz Taguchi, 2000). It has parallels in the quest for more gender-equal and harmonised working conditions in the general world of work.

2.4.4 "Educationalisation" of pre-schooling or "pre-schoolisation" of schooling?

Integration affected each municipality differently depending on local conditions. For example, some Swedish municipalities have small populations but cover very large geographical areas, and the educational level of the staff can vary considerably. In municipalities with a high educational level and a strong local economy, early childhood educators gained in status with a higher ratio of pre-school teachers and as a result of integration with compulsory schooling. Most of these municipalities are quite small, and the increased communication between pre-schooling and schooling has helped boost feelings of professional status.

A fear of the "educationalisation" of pre-school under integration was partially borne out by the findings of the National Agency for Education evaluations summarised above. Haug had already in 1992 shown, in an Norwegian study, that pre-school teachers in schooling tend to be more traditionally school-like than primary schoolteachers themselves. For example, they were found to use textbooks more than compulsory schoolteachers, and to be less likely to encourage the child's own thinking and experience. Haug concluded that pre-school teachers worked according to notions of what a schoolteacher "is" rather than from knowledge of current school practices (Haug, 1992).

But while six-year-olds are now experiencing more school-like practices than before the integration, it has probably not had the same effect on pre-schooling for one-

to-five-year-olds. When six-year-olds were still in pre-schools, there was a strong tendency to "educationalise" the last year of pre-schooling (Pramling-Samuelsson & Mauritzson, 1997). The tradition to prepare children for schooling may no longer concern pre-schooling.

Without detailed descriptions of the new school practices, it may seem as if Swedish schooling has hardly changed at all. The reality, however, is that the compulsory school system has undergone extensive change, due at least in part to the coordination and integration process. The integration of leisure-time/activity centres into schooling is probably the most important example. The nature and purpose of the school has shifted from providing pure education to raising children to become democratic citizens. In effect, rather than the "educationalisation" of pre-schooling, Sweden may be seeing the "pre-schoolisation" of schooling.

A typical Swedish school today is a place for both education and care, where many children between six and 12 spend up to 10 hours a day in the same buildings, while their parents work and travel back and forth to their jobs. As a result of the integration, teachers work in teams with other personnel. In a sense, schools have adapted to the realities of family life, taking on the role previously played by the pre-school of "substitute for the home" (Dahlberg & Lenz Taguchi, 1994). With children in their care for such long hours, educators are concerned with all aspects of their development. Like pre-school teachers throughout the 20th century, today's schoolteachers are concerned with all kinds of learning, including social, emotional and physical (motor), and explore ways to integrate such thinking into their regular routine. During the transition some teachers complained about their changing roles, questioning their increased involvement with the children outside the classroom and teaching. Unlike pre-school teachers, they were used to being able to refer children with problems or special needs to specialists or the school nurse or psychologist. Their contact and cooperation with parents was very limited and centred on academic performance. Today, attitudes have changed, at least in primary and secondary schooling. A definite shift has occurred towards thinking of schooling as both a place for holistic learning and an important social arena, in which parental participation is required and expected.

In another shift, upper secondary schools in particular have strengthened collaboration with business and industry, facilitated by the information society. The curriculum for compulsory schooling clearly reflects the shifts towards fostering social and psychological development, increasing cooperation with families and the outside world, and integrating new aspects of learning. At the same time, the new curriculum places a stronger emphasis on basic competence in reading, writing and mathematics. This duality may seem contradictory, but in fact it is a logical response to twin demands on modern education, and is appropriate to the holistic approach and lifelong learning.

The discussion below will further explore shifts in the concepts of education and learning, which now seem to have free-floating borders (Lundgren, 2001; Martin Korpi, 2001). Education increasingly takes place *outside schools* – through the mass media, "intelligent marketing", design and advertising, and cultural activities, as well as via the Internet. The borders between the school, the home and the outside world have become blurred. Has the school become more private, merging with families, or is it becoming ever more public, joining the outside world as a part of the global information society? Perhaps instead the family has become more public. As the age-old public/private dichotomy loses effectiveness as a tool for understanding post-modern society, it is difficult to say whether the school is dissolving as a public institution or the family as a private one.

2.5 Changes in the meaning of educational concepts

2.5.1 The gender context

Swedish society, in general, has become more child-centred. This trend is apparent in family life, consumer patterns, advertising, and schooling and pre-schooling, as well as in legislation. The principle of shared custody of children following divorce is an

example, where it is customary that children live every other week with their divorced mother and father. Welfare policy has aimed at fostering equality by enabling women to have children and work at the same time. About 78 percent of Swedish women with children under seven work, even though 46 percent of these work part-time; about 87 percent of women with children aged 7-10 work, of whom 44 percent work part-time. The corresponding figures for Swedish fathers are 92 percent of those with children under seven (of whom six percent work part-time), and 93 percent of those with children aged 7-10 (five percent part-time). The birth rate in Sweden is one of the highest in Europe (Regeringskansliet, 1999).

The figures show that women are still taking primary responsibility for the care of small children, even in a society long considered to be one of the world's most gender-equal. Some researchers have claimed that women's rights have been neglected in favour of the rights of children, who have become the main object of "emancipation" (Ohrlander, 1992; 1998). Two recent doctoral theses, one in political science and one in psychology, claim that, since the 1970s, Swedish women have been in constant conflict between motherhood and work. Being a good mother meant placing one's child in pre-school for the best kind of social upbringing and education, but only for a limited number of hours per day. The "good mother" transforms rather easily into the "bad mother" – putting her career ahead of her children – if the child attends for more than six or seven hours per day. (This explains why so many working mothers are employed part-time.) In contrast, men are considered "good fathers" for any sort of involvement in their children's upbringing, including picking them up at the pre-school at the end of their working day (Elvin-Nowak, 2001; Jansson, 2001). This issue has become topical in the media, which since the 1970s has tended to be gender-neutral, glossing over gender conflicts or shrugging them off as the product of biological or genetic fact. As in other European countries and the United States, women in Sweden do not generally hold high positions in private enterprise or in the academic world, and their salaries fall short of men's. The exception, often noted internationally, is in politics; half the members of Parliament are women.

2.5.2 The view of childhood

Swedish culture has traditionally seen childhood as the "golden age" of life. Middle-class parents organise their lives around their children's activities, and negotiate with them over how to spend the parents' annual five weeks of holidays. Pre-schools and schools make great efforts to give children influence and encourage their participation (Regeringskansliet, 1999). Children are increasingly expected to take responsibility for their own learning; to seek their own knowledge; to plan and organise their school day and evaluate their own work and learning. Indeed, discussion in the media reflects concerns that children are being rushed into adulthood, as they increasingly act and dress like grown-ups. On the other hand, with Swedes marrying and having children later and later in life, and many continuing studies into their late 20s or early 30s, they seem to be enjoying "extended childhood".

2.5.3 The view of child development

Mainstream developmental psychology is still the prevailing norm in educational practice. However, while developmental psychology states that very small children are far more competent than previously thought, our understanding has shifted to a view of development as a never-ending activity. The new findings of biological and brain research complement or even challenge the hegemony of developmental psychology in the understanding of human development. Schooling has seen a clear shift from teaching pupils as a group to focussing on the individual child's learning processes. Teachers want to learn more about developmental psychology and individual learning styles to help determine children's levels of competence and to support them better individually. In practice, however, shrinking staff-to-child ratios hamper the shift towards a more individual approach.

Compared with other European school systems, the Swedish school system, both before and since the integration of pre-schooling and compulsory schooling, has drawn consistently on the same developmental and psychoanalytic theories and progressive learning ideas. Psychoanalytic, developmental and constructivist learning theories provide both the *common ground* for progress towards more successful integration pedagogy in Sweden's pre-schools and schools and for the evaluation of pre-schools and schools.

2.5.4 The view of learning

The pioneers of pre-schooling saw learning as involving the whole body and all of its senses. They rejected terms such as knowledge and learning, preferring to talk about different forms of innate creativity involving the entire child. Emotional, cognitive, social and motor creativity were innate skills that needed the right milieu to develop *from within*. This milieu was first and foremost a homelike atmosphere, providing food, creative tools and toys and assuring health and hygiene. Freedom, play and creativity have been seen as the natural vehicles to learning and development from within. Consequently play has been advocated as the natural alternative to standard schooling methods of reconstructing knowledge, facts and skills. The pre-school pioneers argued that such rational skills tied to cultural reproduction require mental development, which should by no means be forced on the child. In other words, over the 20th century the Swedish view of learning in pre-schooling became *opposed* to a traditional instrumental view associated with schooling activities, including teaching skills such as writing, reading and mathematics (Dahlberg & Lenz Taguchi, 1994). The field of early childhood pedagogy, by embracing the pre-school "golden age" of free play and development, set up a conflict between *"natural" development* and *discipline*, or between emotional, social and intellectual learning and the teaching of instrumental skills and knowledge in schooling (Lenz Taguchi, 2000). Thus the integration of the two school forms in 1996 can be seen as the culmination of nearly a century of conflict between opposing ideologies concerning childhood, development, learning and children's education.

2.5.5 The view of pre-schooling

During the 1990s, early childhood education and care services became the first choice for most working and studying parents, even though some still preferred family day care. Enrolling children from age one in full-day pre-schools has become generally acceptable. What was once viewed as either a privilege of the wealthy for a few hours a day, or an institution for needy children and single mothers, has become, after 70 years of political vision and policy-making, an unquestionable right of children and families. Furthermore, parents now expect a holistic pedagogy that includes health care, nurturing and education for their pre-schoolers. In addition, acceptance of full-day pre-schooling and schooling has complemented the idea of lifelong learning and the understanding of education as encompassing far more than imparting basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics. As long as the function of education was seen as the cultural reproduction of the Swedish society, little attention was focussed on the early years. The notion of lifelong learning encouraged an expansion of the concept of education. As the concept of learning began to encompass all aspects of life, and the whole body and all its senses, not just certain intellectual and bodily skills, it "fit" better with the pre-school culture.

2.5.6 The understanding of pre-school pedagogy

A government report on "Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden" summarised the basic principles of pre-school pedagogy -- laid down in the new pre-school curriculum and clearly underpinning the revised curriculum for children aged six-16 (Lpo 1994/1998) - as follows:

- Continuous learning and development in close interaction with the surroundings. Children learn the whole time and with all their senses.

- Play and theme-oriented work. Play is of fundamental importance for children and constitutes the basis for pre-school activity. Thinking, imagination, creativity, language and cooperation are developed. Through theme-oriented work, children have more opportunities to understand inter-relationships and contexts and test their own theories about their surroundings.
- Linkage to the child's own prior experiences and knowledge. To learn something new, children must be able to relate it to what they already know, have experienced and are interested in.
- The pedagogical importance of care. Care is of pivotal importance to the child's sense of well-being, and thus a precondition for development and learning. Care also has a pedagogical element, especially for younger children, since it provides experiences and knowledge through which they learn about themselves and the surrounding world.
- Development in groups. The child group is an asset for learning and development. Children need to experience joy together, and adults or toys cannot replace the child's need for other children. Children who are recognised and validated by adults as individuals function well in groups (Regeringskansliet, 1999, pp 50-51).

2.5.7 Conceptualising the integration

In the Swedish context, the integration of pre-schooling and schooling has been problematic conceptually. The term *teaching* was problematic in the pre-school context because it implies an adult-child relationship in which the child is a more or less passive receiver of knowledge imparted by the adult. Terms such as *learning* and *learning processes*, and references to the child and teacher as "co-constructors of culture and knowledge", on the other hand, worked quite well in *both* the pre-school and the schooling contexts. Such formulations can produce new thinking and practices. "Old" concepts, especially regarding status, were problematic in terms of power relations. The terms *teaching* and *pupil* in the integrated context seemed to favour the hegemony of the school culture. The view of lifelong learning as a right of the child, and the child as a constructor of knowledge in all aspects of life, demands new language that will in turn encourage creative thinking and actions.

2.6 Lessons and implications of Sweden's integration

2.6.1 Continuous policy-making and/or national financial expediency?

Sweden's integration of early childhood education and schooling, in terms of the context, the rationales and the process itself, can be seen as the fruit of continuous policy-making dating back as far as the 1930s. The succession of reforms seem to have been carried out according to a well thought-out logic, guided by a well-grounded political vision. But as always, many other analyses are possible. Even though Alva Myrdal, as one of the first influential women politicians and academics, advocated pre-school services as a way of "liberating" both women and children, her ideas did not bear fruit until *other* rationales for expanding pre-schooling emerged. *The overwhelming need for women in the work force in the 1970s was the main impetus for the expansion of early childhood services in Sweden.* The dual purpose of early childhood education and care coincided with the dual purpose of women -- as members of the work force *and* mothers. Swedish women have had better opportunities than any of their counterparts elsewhere in Europe to combine the two roles, in terms of taking maternal leave and returning to their jobs afterward. The historian Kajsa Ohrlander pointed to this as evidence of an increasingly feminised state (Ohrlander, 2000). From another feminist perspective, however, the state can be seen to be merely "filling in" or taking over the responsibilities of fathers (Jansson, 2001). The idea of women's "dual purpose" is not compatible with all feminist visions of equality.

2.6.2 The dual purpose and pre-schooling as a middle-class project

The "dual purpose" of early childhood education and care has underlain a constant struggle to legitimise pedagogical activities. Most unions and political parties that supported the expansion in the 1970s were not primarily seeking children's *education*, but rather a collective "baby-sitting". With the global information society demanding well-educated populations, the educational purpose of early childhood services has begun to dominate public debate. Those who argued for the importance of education and pedagogy all along have thus been vindicated by *other needs and rationales*.

Pre-schooling has been widely recognised as a middle-class project. It was middle-class parents who enrolled their children in full-day services alongside children with special needs and those of single mothers in the early and mid-1900s. The trust placed by the middle class in these services was an important factor enabling today's integration and validating the idea of lifelong learning, leaving aside the question of whether this trust was motivated by visions of building a democratic society or of facilitating dual income families. Today, the middle-class families still believe their children should be partly raised in the pre-school, and the financial motivation as well as women's equality remains as strong if not stronger.

One conclusion is that the twin purposes of early childhood services -- care *and* education – are equally important. Also, they both complement and substitute for the home during a substantial part of the day. The services need to be seen as something that families cannot entirely provide by themselves; that produce stimulating learning situations and friendships as well as democratic, collective nurturing.

2.6.3 Central coordination vs. local diversity and autonomy

Contemporary Sweden is witnessing two simultaneous movements that can be seen as complementary or partly opposed to each other. One is towards a more coherent and integrated educational system for *all* children of *all* ages and with *all* kinds of special needs or rights. The notion of lifelong learning strongly supports this movement. The other is towards the provision of more diverse and heterogeneous educational services to families, children and youth in terms of content, learning styles, learning environment and even pedagogical philosophy. Despite the seeming contradiction, an astute logic underlies the two movements' coexistence.

From the 1960s, Sweden's system of schools and early childhood services was highly centralised, offering few or no alternatives to the individual family. Starting in the mid-1980s, the system gradually became more decentralised, liberal and heterogeneous, giving families a choice of content, teaching styles and locations. "Semi-private" services, funded by the state but owned by companies or staff pools, have been allowed. Some municipalities today have more "semi-private" than municipally owned services. In others there are none. The logic, on the one hand, is to harmonise and rationalise early childhood education and care in accordance with political goals. On the other hand, actual responsibility for the services is decentralised to municipalities and citizens. By devolving administrative and evaluative responsibilities to the people who actually perform the services, costs are kept very low and a sense of choice and autonomy is achieved. Individuals and staff pools can implement their own ideas, as long as they comply with the goals of the curriculum, and as long as the services are thoroughly evaluated. The Swedish approach to building a nation of knowledge and education revolves around strong central visions and goals, matched by an abiding trust in local responsibility and initiative. Thus the system is both centralised and decentralised, resisting traditional bipolar thinking, which is perhaps the best approach in today's post-modern society.

2.6.4 The right to universal pre-schooling in a post-modern, flexible information society

Some observers may be surprised by the insistence that *all* children, not just children of working and studying parents, should have the right to pre-schooling. The world of work has changed, necessitating a rethink of the traditional *employment-unemployment* dichotomy. People change jobs more frequently today, and are unemployed for shorter periods. When parents become unemployed, their small children should not be removed from their ongoing education and social life in pre-school. To do so also impedes the parent's search for new work. In January 2003, all four- and five-year-olds will be entitled to attend free pre-schooling for at least 525 hours per year. While attendance is voluntary for the children, the provision of the services is mandatory for the municipalities. Some politicians may have been surprised by the need to rethink the purpose of pre-schooling. But changes in legislation were necessary at the national level, since municipalities could perhaps not be expected to regulate the right to services. The increased accessibility, as well as the maximum fee reform, both helped to fulfil the political aim of providing universal access to lifelong learning, which cannot be compromised locally.

2.6.5 Summary of the implications of integration in Sweden

To summarise this case study of the integration of pre-schooling and schooling under the auspices of Sweden's Ministry of Education and Science, following are some conclusions from the Swedish experience:

- Laws have been necessary to give children, women and other subordinate groups certain rights.
- Political policy-making has "married" issues of equality of women and children with society's need for a well-educated work force and lifelong learning, while building, maintaining or improving a welfare society for all citizens.
- Early childhood education and care is simultaneously the *right of all children* during the most learning-intensive period of life, and a set of services provided to families as a high-quality complement to the home.
- Issues concerning gender equality in the work force and the right to parental leave have gone hand in hand with early childhood education and care issues.
- Early childhood services can shift in emphasis from caring to a more pedagogical and educational approach more readily than an educational pre-school service can be integrated into a dual-purpose service. The reason for this lies in the relative status attached to care and pedagogy. It has thus been important to emphasise that *care can also be understood as pedagogy and education, and education and pedagogy can also be understood as care from a lifelong learning and development perspective*.
- Goal-governed central regulation has co-existed with decentralised responsibilities for finance as well as pedagogy, so that services in some municipalities have developed in accordance with local conditions and the specific needs of children and families.
- More resources should be earmarked for documenting and evaluating the services. Evaluation of the central goals by the National Agency for Education should be seen as a complement to local evaluations carried out by practitioners and local officials.
- Support has been limited from the central level in terms of supervision and help interpreting the central goals – understanding lifelong learning, children's individual and group learning processes, the teacher's role, teachers' cooperative practices, ethics, and how to formulate local documents.
- At the local level the integration could have gone further if teachers and other staff had been given time to reflect on their *current* practices, and the similarities and differences in relation to centrally formulated goals for pre-schooling and

schooling. The practitioners have stated that they need time to "take up" new concepts – such as lifelong learning – and to formulate and reformulate what they are doing and what they would like to be doing in relation to their interpretation of the central goals. The central level must take greater responsibility for facilitating the exchange of ideas and practices, and discussion of new opportunities or specific difficulties.

- Both the central and local level could have made examples of practices that already work out well and are in line with central goals, while considering different approaches to organisation and planning in local contexts, where preconditions vary widely.
- What remains to be evaluated is the output of local interpretations of the central goals - how the main concepts and visions have been translated into practices and results.

2.7 Update on the Commission for New Pre-school / School Law (SOU 2002:121)

Based on the result of the evaluation carried out by the National Agency for Education (Skolverket, 2000; 2001a; 2001b and 2001c), a Commission for New Pre-school / School Law was set up to harmonise the legislations of pre-schooling and schooling. The Commission produced in early 2003 the following recommendations.

- Pre-schooling shall be considered as a form of schooling starting from the age of one. Pre-schooling shall be legislated as voluntary schooling, which 4-5 year olds can attend, free of charge, 525 hours per year (3 hours a day). Pre-schooling, by law, shall be provided by municipalities. This is to recognise pre-schooling as the first step of lifelong learning. Accordingly, the following revisions shall be made to some of the existing concepts and be reflected systematically in legislative texts:
  - The word, ***school***, shall refer to pre-school, activity-centre as well as compulsory school.
  - The use of such words as ***teaching*** and ***pupil*** shall be embraced in both pre-school and school contexts.[1]
- It shall be legislated that the municipalities evaluate every year the quality of all services for children from 1 to 19 years old in reference to the national goals and curriculum.[2]

The purpose of these recommendations by the Commission was to harmonise different forms of school and to enable the government, by law, to ensure that pre-schools and schools maintain the same quality throughout the country. But some of these recommendations inherently imply the educationalisation of the meaning and practice of pre-schooling. In other words, although there has been much political rhetoric for the importance of pre-school pedagogy and the holistic view of childhood and learning, and for the importing of these to schools, evaluation and research findings seem to show that it is the schooling that has spearheaded pre-schooling, not the other way round. Pre-schoolisation has occurred to the extent that schools are now providing whole-day care for school age children and that schoolteachers are encouraged to be concerned more with the children's socialisation issues (e.g., children's well-being, and family participation, etc.). But in the content and pedagogy of pre-schooling, much emphasis is now placed on learning, which is a clear sign of educationalisation.

[1] As noted in Point 2.2.5, these recommendations reflect the hegemony of the school culture.

[2] For pre-school education, this constitutes a major change, because its evaluation to date has been in reference to local plans only and not to the national curriculum.

III. References

Interviews:

Barbara Martin Korpi, (*Ämnesråd*, Senior Adviser), 11 November 2001, in person (two hours) at the Ministry of Education and Science. (The interview was taped.)

Ulf. P. Lundgren, (Professor in Education and former Director-General of the National Agency of Education), 20 December 2001, by telephone (1½ hours) from Uppsala University. (Note-taking.)

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